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AN EXPERIMENT IN SCHOOL-LIBRARY WORK.

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ALL New York City is divided into five parts. The New York Public Library has jurisdiction in three parts, or boroughs, Manhattan, Bronx and Richmond. The district which the library embraces is about a mile and a half wide. To the north branch from the one of the south end the distance as a crow would fly is just thirty-eight miles. The influence of the library, however, is much more extended, as many borrowers live without the three boroughs. Charts show a territory of about six miles wide and forty-five miles long wherein live persons who hold and use regular borrowers' cards. In this territory there prevails nearly every phase of public library activity, from the deposit station in quarry and lumber camp, in penal colonies and country schools where the staff consists of one teacher and a cleaner, to the great central library now in course of construction.

Confronted with such diverse and varying conditions the youngest of the great libraries of the country has not yet devised any one plan to offer in settlement of the much debated question of school and library co-operation. Each of the thirty-four branch libraries has to face a somewhat different situation and in some localities circumstances widely vary. To be thorough a report of the school activities of the library would have to be made branch by branch. It would include endeavors of the usual kinds, deposit stations; loans other than books (pictures and various illustrative material); story hours; picture bulletins prepared to accord with the "Course of study" for different grades of the public schools; instruction to classes and groups of pupils in the use of catalogs, indexes, etc.; talks to teachers at their meetings; regular monthly visits to schools; distribution monthly of the "*List of Additions*;" preparation of reading lists; the aiding of individual teachers to personal

advancement; a model school library; and consideration of the special problems of the high and evening schools. More or less of this is common to many of the branches. The details of each effort are so well understood in the modern library and among modern librarians that the subject may be dismissed with a word, except to call attention to one or two conditions which are perhaps exceptional.

The Board of Education of the City of New York has established an excellent department of school libraries which provides books both for circulation and reference use. That department has organized in the three boroughs 5836 class libraries in 260 schools, with 321,921 volumes. The records show a home circulation in these boroughs for one-half of the school year of 1,849,345 volumes, and a reference use of 107,457 volumes. This is a total annual use of about four million volumes. The graded, annotated catalog of class room libraries, which has been issued by the Board of Education, is said to have had a marked effect in improving the character and number of books used in this way.

In addition to the class room libraries which are supplied by the school authorities the Travelling Library office of the Public Library maintains in the day schools fifty-five deposit stations, with 4069 volumes, the annual home circulation of which is about 44,000 volumes. This department has, in the three boroughs, an additional recorded annual circulation through the evening schools, recreation centers and playgrounds of about 155,000 volumes. These figures do not include many stations in no way connected with the schools, the total annual circulation of which was last year 450,000 volumes.

It has been necessary to explain local affairs at length to show that the experiment which is now being tested is in addition to a not inconsiderable united effort to bring the

right books into the hands of school pupils, teachers and principals.

Last year, through the courtesy of the Board of Education, in fifty of the public schools regular bulletin boards for the exclusive use of the Public Library were erected. The bulletins, in dimensions about 2 ft. 6 in. by 3 ft. were placed on the main stairways. On the bulletin boards are affixed announcements of whatever matters the librarian in charge of the nearest branch may consider to be of interest to teachers or pupils. The first announcement is:

"The nearest branch of the Public Library is located at ——. Teachers in this school will find it to their advantage to secure their books from that branch." A list of all the branches for the free circulation of books throughout the three boroughs, with the hours of opening, is posted. On every bulletin the terms under which teachers and pupils may use the library are set forth in the following words:

"For those teachers who are undertaking special studies, or who are doing other definite literary work, arrangements may be made to secure books necessary for such study. These special books must be renewed monthly, and no books may be retained for a greater period than six months. Books are so loaned with the understanding that they must be returned upon special request after two weeks from the date of borrowing.

"Popular current fiction may be borrowed in the usual manner.

"Endorsements are not required for membership cards of teachers in the public elementary and high schools, day or evening.

"Books for immediate and temporary use in class rooms will be loaned upon receipt of request signed by any teacher who has registered at the designated branch.

"Teachers are often asked to endorse their pupils' applications for the privilege of using the library. This library regards such endorsements from teachers in the day schools merely as notes of introduction, and guarantors are not held financially responsible for losses that result from applications which have been signed for their pupils.

"Teachers who take an interest in their pupils' reading will be pleased to remember that this library is always glad to send application blanks to them for distribution in the class room. In every way within its power this library will be glad to further practical co-operation between the schools and its branches throughout the city."

In this way the teachers are informed of the location of the nearest branch; that they

may have as many books as they desire for study and that the books may be retained, if necessary, for a period of six months. They are also informed that, "In other branches there are about 60,000 books (separate titles) not contained in that branch. Any one of these will be sent for when desired, subject only to the demand at the other branch." The library maintains a daily inter-branch express service. If desired books are in a branch nearly forty miles distant they may be ordered by telephone and delivered during the same day.

It has been deemed advisable, for obvious reasons, to give all work with teachers to one assistant in each branch. This assistant is ranked in Class C, one grade below First Assistant. She is expected to familiarize herself with the course of study, to keep in touch with the public schools and to know personally as many teachers and principals as possible.

The result of the experiment of last year with fifty bulletins has warranted doubling the number of schools in which is done work of this character. The rules with regard to loans of books to teachers have been extended to all branches of the New York Public Library, Circulation Department. About the time that these lines are to be published there will be bulletin boards in 103 school buildings. Schools have been selected which are so located that fifteen branch libraries form centers from which operations are conducted. In these schools there are 189,018 pupils and nearly 5000 teachers, exclusive of the elementary and high evening schools, which are conducted in the same buildings.

When a teacher becomes a member of the library at one of the branches where the system is in use, record is made of her school grade or department, and the list of books which she may especially desire is entered on a card index. The cards of this index are divided by the usual guides so that each school is separately represented. On the cards are entered the lists of books desired, the dates obtained and delivered to the teachers and the dates of return. It is the duty of the assistant in charge of the work to see that the books, if in any branch, are obtained, or if not, are purchased, subject to usual conditions of purchase. When new books which relate to grade work are published it

is the duty of the assistant in charge to post such information on all bulletins in schools which have been assigned to her branch.

So much for the aim of the library with regard to teachers and of the methods for accomplishing the results desired.

Work with the pupils is divided into two kinds, circulating and reference. Of the actual circulation of books to children there is perhaps little to relate which is especially new. Possibly the chief point is the official announcement that teachers are no longer "held financially responsible for losses which result from applications which have been endorsed for their pupils."

In New York the great difficulty with reference work in the children's department has been the vast number of young persons, each with a different need, who swarm into the libraries during about two hours each day. Within ten minutes' walk of one branch, for example, there 33,376 registered pupils in the public, in addition to several other large schools. In that district there are three branch libraries. They are liable to be consulted at any time by about 16,000 pupils. Information on any subject mentioned in the course of study may have to be sought for impatient children. Under such conditions it has been impossible to devote to every child that care and personal interest which are so important in dealing with such demands.

By organized co-operation with principals and with teachers of various grades the probable reference work has been so grouped that the very difficulty of great numbers has become an advantage. The anticipated use of reference material is confined to the pupils of the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth school years. The studies for these years are so arranged that, by aid of teachers it has been possible to prepare term plans for each of the mentioned grades. These term plans were prepared by one of the editors of *School Work*, and were based upon the work set out in the "Course of study," and divided into numbered and dated weeks. That is to say, by following the term plans any teacher can tell at a glance in which week she is supposed to teach a given subject. The preparation of such plans involved a great deal of consultation and experience. The plans, however, can hardly be ideal. At the best they

are but planned for the average class. The work has been ably done for the school year. One subject has been selected by the library from the term plans for each week of every represented grade. A list of the subjects selected, with the schedule of dates, has been printed on cards for each grade, together with a brief explanation. The cards are in size 6 x 12 in. One for each grade is posted on the bulletin boards in the schools and one is displayed in each class room of the grade for which it was printed. The wording of the brief explanation is as follows:

"GRADE 5 B.

"The branch of the New York Public Library, located at ———, will be prepared to give special attention to pupils in this grade who desire to consult books of reference in connection with their scheduled grade work. The term plans in History, as published in the October and January issues of *School Work* will be used as a basis for the preparation of material, which will be set aside in the library for the use of pupils between the dates indicated in the following schedule. Pupils of this grade will be welcomed at the library, where they will find many delightful books."

It seems to be an advantage to know in advance and to some extent to be prepared when a number of persons desire to consult the library on one subject. Time can be saved and the individual student may be given a much greater share of attention. Instead of numerous subjects as heretofore, the pupil is now apt to ask for only one of eight, for which the children's reference librarian has had opportunity to prepare in advance. Pupils in this way are taught the use of indexes, and that the magazine files and circulating department books may be used for reference purposes.

The danger of the method is of its developing a machine way of laying out the work and of neglecting to give to it the right care and thought. This danger is, however, common to all other parts of library methods, and is one which some such system will aid to discover, and it is hoped, eliminate.

The cost of this method of reaching the pupils and teachers has been very little. For each branch library a card index on which to keep records of books needed by teachers and a few minor supplies are all that has been required. One of the supplies is a special borrower's card, designed to meet the



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demands which the regulations for teachers have very naturally developed. These cards provide spaces in which to register original dates of loans, dates of renewal and also a space in which is recorded the call numbers of each volume. This has been found desirable, for when several volumes are loaned at one time, and returned separately, there has not been in case of loss any support of the library's contention of the non-return of a volume in dispute, beyond the bare record of charging on the book card. With this special card there should be no reason for claims of borrowers that books have been returned. Such claims were quite frequent, and usually proven unfounded, before the adoption of the special card. The cost in the schools has been confined to that of constructing and erecting the bulletin boards and the printing of notices. The maintenance in the schools averages in cost just two cents for each class room for the term. This estimate includes printed

notices, but does not include typewritten and mimeograph announcements which have no direct bearing on the schedule for the grade. The value of the plan? Who can say?

The task has been to learn the needs of the pupils and teachers and to so order the work and to plan such rules as to make possible and encourage the real use of the library; and to provide means whereby both teachers and pupils may be told, retold and told again and reminded from time to time of the library and of its ability and readiness to respond promptly and cordially to any reasonable demands.

The scheme as in use at present is by no means perfect, nor yet without several defects. There seems, however, to be more than a germ of value in the plan of library bulletin boards in schools. The idea was first suggested by Dr. Canfield, of Columbia University, about five years ago, to whom credit is due.